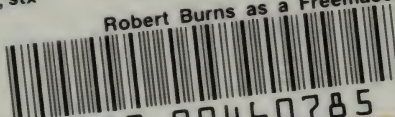


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ROBERT BURNS  
AS A  
FREEMASON







ROBERT BURNS,  
Depute Master, St. James Tarbolton Kilwinning,  
No. 178, now No. 135.



# ROBERT BURNS

AS A

## FREEMASON.

By WILLIAM HARVEY, J.P.

Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland  
Author of "Scottish Chapbook Literature";  
"Scottish Life and Character in Anecdote and  
Story"; "The Stirling Repository"; "The  
Complete Manual of Freemasonry";  
Etc., Etc.



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## PREFACE.

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The association of the national bard with the brethren of the mystic tie forms one of the most picturesque aspects of the poet's short and interesting career. Burns was a "keen" Mason, by which I mean not that he was facile in the use of grip, word, and sign, but that he found much pleasure in the gatherings of the ancient and honourable fraternity of free and accepted masons and fellows of the Craft, and spent many a happy hour in what is described masonically in Scotland as "Harmony," and elsewhere as "The Fourth Degree." A goodly number of his acquaintances were Freemasons, and it is not too much to say that not a few of them derive any immortality they enjoy by living in the shadow of his fame.

## *Preface*

IN the following pages I have sought to gather up the scattered references to Freemasonry that are found in the record of the poet's life, and to weave the whole into a more or less connected narrative. I have endeavoured to adhere closely to my subject, and my constant aim has been accuracy in matters of fact. I hope the book will appeal not only to Freemasons, but also to lovers of Burns both at home and abroad.

Sincere thanks are due and are hereby accorded to Bro. William Lawson, P.M. Lodge St. David, No. 36, Edinburgh, for the photographs, and to M.E. Comp. Alfred A. Arbuthnot Murray, Grand Scribe E., for the use of the blocks of the illustrations in the body of the work. For the frontispiece I am indebted to the artistic skill of Bros. P. E. Green, and J. H. Thoms, both of Progress, Dundee, No. 967.

WILLIAM HARVEY.

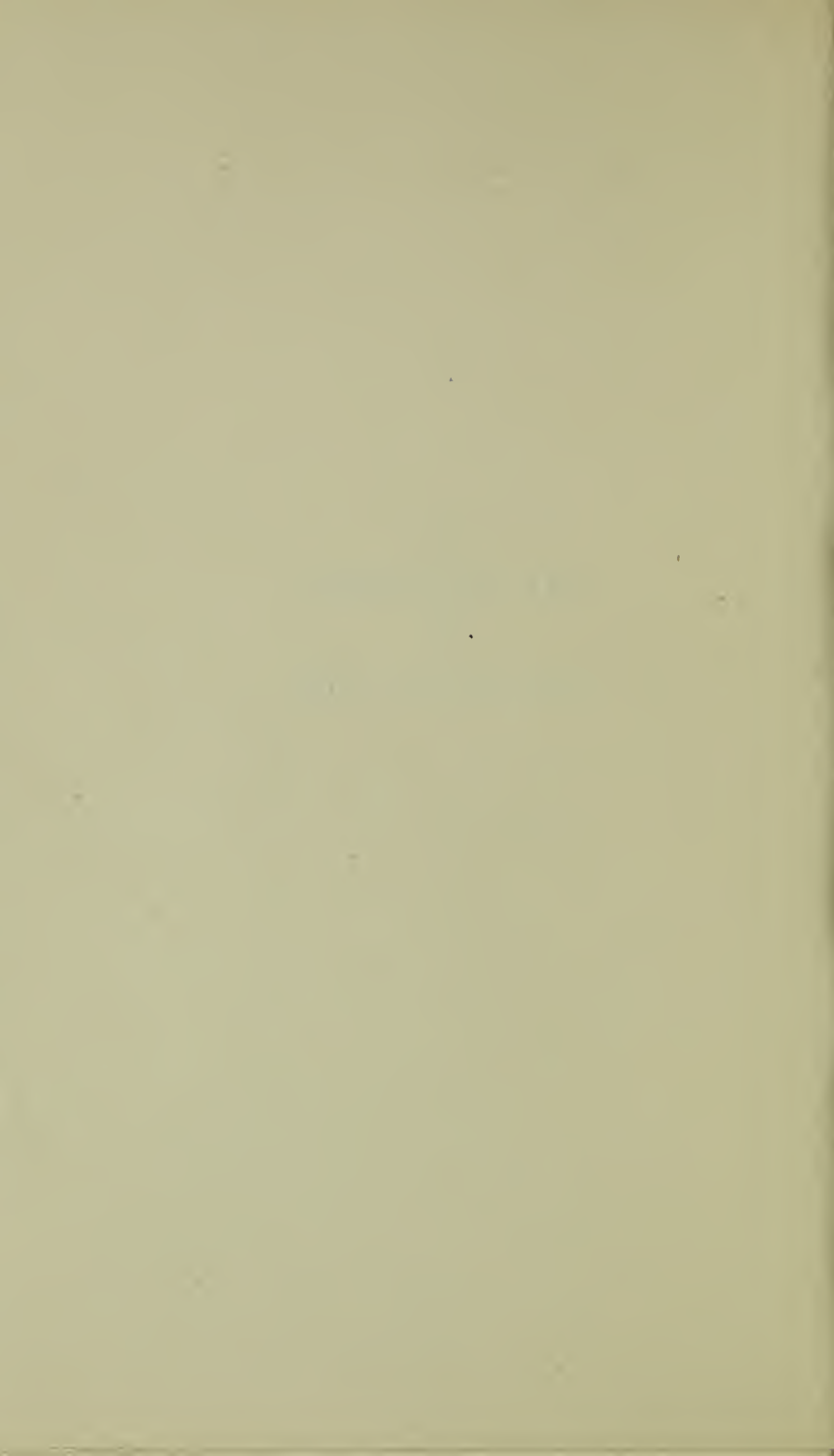
4 Gowrie Street,  
Dundee.

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TO  
THE BRETHREN  
OF  
THE MYSTIC TIE.





# ROBERT BURNS

## AS A

### FREEMASON.

---

The most distinguished name on the roll of Scottish Freemasonry is that of Robert Burns, and members of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity must ever regard it as an interesting fact that Scotland's national poet was a brother of the Craft. His Masonic career covered a period of fifteen summers, and from the night in 1781, when he was admitted to a knowledge of the mysteries and privileges of the Square and Compasses, to the day of his death in 1796, he was keenly interested in all that pertained to the brotherhood.

Freemasonry in Tarbolton—the Ayrshire town in which Burns first saw Masonic light—derived from Mother Kilwinning. On 17th May, 1771,

the Master of Kilwinning issued a Charter for the erection of a Lodge under the name and title of Tarbolton, Kilwinning, but whatever was the pedigree, and however venerable the history of the Ayrshire seat of Masonry, its influence at this time was rapidly waning before the growing power of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and two years later twenty of the brethren seceded from Tarbolton Kilwinning, and craved the Grand Lodge to establish them as a Lodge under its sovereignty. A charter was duly issued and on February 26, 1773, the new Lodge came into being under the name and title of St David's, Tarbolton, No. 174. Those who had been left in the old Tarbolton Lodge were not long in expressing a desire also to be associated with the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and about a year later—on 27th May, 1774—they were erected into a Lodge with the name of St James's Tarbolton, Kilwinning, No. 178. Probably there had been some little jealousy over the original secession, and this doubtless had led to the erection of two separate lodges, but ere long the



The Meeting Place of the Bachelors' Club  
(Front View)



brethren found that there was not room for both in the little Ayrshire town, and they agreed to sink their differences and unite under the name of St David's. The union was duly consummated on 25th June, 1781, the name St David being adopted because that lodge held "the oldest Charter."

It was into this united Lodge some nine days after the union, that Burns was initiated. His entrance fee was twelve shillings and sixpence, and he was **made** at the hands of Alexander Wood, a tailor in Tarbolton. The Lodge had no other "work" on hand that evening, as may be gathered from the Minute, which is brevity itself and simply records the fact under date July 4:—

Robert Burns in Lochly was entered an apprentice.

In view of his subsequent fame it seems almost providential that there was nothing else to occupy the attention of the brethren on that particular and important occasion—no other business to share the Minute.

There is some difference of opinion as to the exact spot in which the poet

was admitted to the mysteries of the Craft. One tradition is to the effect that the brethren constituted their Lodge in Manson's tavern, situated in what is now called Burns Street, but from a careful study of all the facts, Bro. W. Lawson, P.M. of Lodge St David, Edinburgh, inclines to the view that, at the time of the poet's initiation, the Lodge met in the little hall in which the Bachelor Club, founded by Burns and kindred spirits, was wont to assemble, and that, consequently, it was in that hall that the Bard was entered apprentice, and clothed.

Just about the time when Burns was admitted to the mystic circle he removed to Irvine to learn the business of flaxdresser. This naturally interfered with attendance at the Lodge, and some months elapsed ere he received any advancement in the Order. He was passed Fellowcraft, and raised Master, on 1st October. Again, his was the only business before the brethren. The Minute sets forth that—

Robert Burns in Lochly was passed and raised ;  
and that the officers were Henry Cow-



an, Master; James Humphrey, S.W.; Alex. Smith, J.W.; Robert Wodrow, Secretary; and James Manson, Treasurer.

Burns's stay in Irvine was not of long duration, and when he returned to the assistance of his brother in working the farm of Lochlea, he found himself comparatively near the Lodge meeting-place, and would doubtless interest himself in its affairs. The two lodges that had come together under the name of St David were not happy in their union. Some of the members, including the Secretary, objected to the identity of Lodge St James being wholly sunk, and in less than a year's time they withdrew and re-established themselves under their old title. Burns adhered to the seceders, and with St James's Lodge he was thenceforward identified. What part he took in these early days is not clear, but there are indications that he was not in any sense inactive. Apparently the re-established St James's Lodge had not all its sorrows to seek. It began its new career on 17th June, 1782, with Bro. James Montgomerie acting as Grand Master

“ for the night.” Thereafter the brethren appointed Sir John Whitefoord, Bart., of Ballochmyle, as Master, and a few months later they addressed him on the sad condition into which the Lodge had fallen. The letter, which is in Burns’s hand-writing, and in the composition of which he had probably chief share, sets forth that the Lodge’s affairs, with respect to finances, had been in a wretched situation for a good while. Condescending upon particulars, it went on as follows :—

We have considerable sums in bills which lie by without being paid, or put in execution, and many of our members never mind their yearly dues, or anything else belonging to our Lodge. And since the separation from St David’s, we are not sure even of our existence as a Lodge. There has been a dispute before the Grand Lodge, but how decided, or if decided at all, we know not.

For these and other reasons, we humbly beg the favour of you, as soon as convenient, to call a meeting, and let us consider on some means to retrieve our wretched affairs.



On the above mentioned day the two Lodges above mentioned by your names the names of St David & St David's were united & now go under the name of St David's Lodge in the West of Chastel. & was chosen of the following officers

Test of Office Masters for 1781

Joseph Newman Mas	John Newman Sen. Master
Ben. Graham Sen. Wm	John Graham Sen. Wm
John Wright Sen. Wm	James Graham Sen. Wm
James Mansel Sen. Wm	John Wright Sen. Wm
Robt. Newman Sen. Wm	John Newman Sen. Wm
Wm. Graham Sen. Wm	Law. Graham Sen. Wm

Inducement for July 6<sup>th</sup>  
 Robt. Newman was taken as an Apprentice

Inducement for July 6<sup>th</sup>  
 Robert Newman was taken as an Apprentice

Tarbolton Wednesday Dec 5. 1781  
 J<sup>rs</sup> Newman - J<sup>rs</sup> Thompson - J<sup>rs</sup> Henry - J<sup>rs</sup> Stewart  
 William Dick - J<sup>rs</sup> John Richard - J<sup>rs</sup> James Stewart  
 John Tench Taylor - The visitation of Brother. Nathan  
 William was Requested for Supply finding he was in want  
 for Lodg. Dub. - the above officers & Masters on Inducement 6<sup>th</sup>  
 viz. Henry Green James Thompson - William Dick - J<sup>rs</sup> Stewart  
 Declared they never granted any Liberty to Brother Robt. Newman  
 to take out of the Lodge Book a Charter by name of  
 Tarbolton - but have from the said Charter. Remitted as  
 above - Now ordered that all B<sup>rs</sup> shall be examined  
 at the Lodge is ordered to pay the

Page from Minute Book of Lodge St. David, Tarbolton, shewing entry recording the Initiation of the Poet.



The fact that Burns's penmanship was requisitioned for this appeal to the Grand Master is proof that the poet was interested in the welfare of the Lodge, and further proof is found in the additional fact that, shortly afterwards, he was elected to an important office. On 30th June, 1784, the brethren removed their meeting-place to the Cross Keys, a small Tarbolton public-house kept by James Manson, and there, on the 27th July, they chose Burns as their Depute-Master. At that time it was customary for a Lodge to select its Grand Master from the county gentry, and the man who assumed the office was usually little more than a figure-head who attended meetings at rare intervals, and who left the duties of the Chair to his Depute. As a consequence of this custom Burns, for four years, was the virtual Master of St James's, and thus did it come about, as he tells us in his poetical "Farewell," that he was "oft honoured with supreme command" in directing the affairs of the "Sons of Light."

By his enthusiasm Burns justified his election to the leading place in the

Lodge. Robert Chambers tells us that, according to the reports of old associates, he was "so keen a mason, that he would hold lodges for the admission of new members in his own house;" and it was at one of these lodges that his brother Gilbert was admitted to the Craft. During his term of office as Depute Master, the brethren were convened no fewer than seventy times. Burns was present at thirty-three of these meetings, and his attendances would doubtless have been much more numerous had it not been that he was away from the locality for fairly long periods in the momentous years of 1787 and 1788.

Many people who figure in the poems of Burns were associated with him as brethren of the mystic tie. The first man whom he initiated into Freemasonry was Matthew Hall, a famous Ayrshire fiddler, who was wont to accompany James M'Lauchlan, the "thairm-inspiring sage," whose "Highland lug" and "matchless hand" are immortalised in "The Brigs of Ayr," and it doubtless remained one of Hall's happiest memories that

he had received his first lesson in Freemasonry at the hands of Robert Burns.

The Secretary of the Lodge during the time when the poet was Depute-Master was John Wilson, schoolmaster of the parish, better known to every Burns student as "Dr Hornbook." To supplement his meagre salary as parochial dominie, Wilson opened a grocer's shop, and having carefully studied Buchan's "Domestic Medicine," added a few medical preparations to his stock, and then in a printed shop-bill informed the public that "advice would be given in common disorders at the shop gratis." Impressed with his own importance Wilson, at a meeting of the Lodge in the spring of 1785, made a rather pompous parade of his medical skill to the great amusement of Burns, who had a fair knowledge of the dominie's incapacity. Tradition says that the Secretary and the Depute-Master got to logger-heads over the business, and that the dispute was continued after the Lodge was closed. Burns and Wilson parted at Tarbolton Mill on the road to Mossgiel, and as the poet continued his homeward way—

The clachan yill had made him canty,  
He was na fou, but just had plenty—

he conceived and partly composed the famous colloquy between himself and Death concerning the art and skill of Doctor Hornbook. On the authority of Lockhart, it was long believed that the satire ruined Wilson alike as school-master and medicine-man, and that the dominie was driven from the parish in disgrace. Later research, however, has proved this to be inaccurate. He continued Secretary of the Lodge till 1787—two years after the poem had become public property—and his signature as session-clerk of Tarbolton is found in documents as late as 1793. Wilson himself was not wholly displeased with the satire. He spoke to Gilbert Burns about it on one occasion, and his view was that the poem “was pretty severe in some things; but, on the whole, it was rather a compliment.” The dominie may have shared the opinion of many gifted statesmen, that it is better to be abused than to be ignored.

Sometimes the discussions in the Lodge took a theological turn. James Humphry, who was Senior Warden at



Burns's initiation, is described as "a critic of sermons, a meddler with ministers, a long-tongued disputant about texts," who had a remarkable flow of language and a rare gift for controversy. This "noisy polemic," as Burns calls him, came frequently to grips with the poet on the subject of New Light, and their debates added a spice of excitement to some of the harmony nights. As a result of these disputations Burns wrote an epitaph upon Jamie which has invested him with an inglorious immortality. But, like the original of Doctor Hornbook, Humphry was not displeased at the notice taken of him. He survived till 1844, proudly insisting to the end of his days that he was the man to whom Burns had referred as "a bleth'rin bitch"!

Burns's services as Depute-Master were recognised by his re-election to the office in July, 1785, and during that year, and until the spring of 1786 when domestic troubles began to assail him, he never missed attendance at the Lodge. At a meeting held on 1st March, 1786, his brother Gilbert who had been "entered" at Mauchline was "passed

and raised." The brethren were evidently dissatisfied with their meeting-place in Manson's tavern, and about this time began to bestir themselves. A curious proposition is recorded in the Minute of 15th June. It is in the following terms:—

It was proposed by the Lodge, that, as they much wanted a lodge-room, a proposal be laid before the heritors, who are intending to build a steeple here, that the Lodge will contribute to the building of a lodge-room, as the basis of that steeple; and that, from the funds of the Lodge, they offer fifteen pounds, besides what will be advanced from the particular friends of the Lodge. In order that this proposal be properly laid before the heritors, five persons, namely, the Right Worshipful Master, Brother M'Math, Brother Burns, Brother Wodrow, Brother William Andrew—are appointed to meet on Saturday at one o'clock, to draw up a proposal to lay before the heritors on Friday first.

What became of the proposal does not appear.



The annual meeting of St James's Lodge was held on the 24th of June, when the brethren observed the anniversary of St John the Baptist by walking in procession. As Midsummer Day was one of the few occasions on which Freemasonry came before the public, Burns was specially anxious that there should be a good muster of the brethren, and towards this end used to address the members personally. One rhyming invitation which he sent to his medical adviser and friend, Dr Mackenzie of Mauchline, has been preserved, and may be quoted :—

Friday first's the day appointed  
By our Right Worshipful Anointed  
To hold our grand procession,  
To get a blaud o' Johnnie's morals,  
An' taste a swatch o' Manson's barrels  
I' th' way of our profession.  
Our Master and the Brotherhood  
Wad a' be gled to see you.  
For me, I wad be mair than proud  
To share the mercies wi' you.  
If Death, then, wi' skaith then  
Some mortal heart is hechtin',  
Inform him, an' storm him  
That Saturday ye'll fecht him

The lines are signed " Robert Burns, D.M.," and are dated from "Mossgiel, 14th June, A.M. 5790."

It is generally believed that as Depute-Master, Burns was a distinct success, alike in inspiring his brethren with enthusiasm, and in discharging the duties of the Chair. Professor Dugald Stewart, writing of a visit paid to Ayrshire, says that he was led by curiosity to attend a Mason Lodge where Burns presided.

He had occasion to make some short unpremeditated compliments to different individuals, from whom he had no reason to expect a visit, writes the Professor—and everything he said was happily conceived and forcibly as well as fluently expressed.

An anecdote which has been preserved also testifies to the dignity with which he filled the Master's chair. An acquaintance of Dr Mackenzie to whom Burns had addressed his rhyming invitation to the mid-summer procession, was very anxious to be introduced to the poet. One day the doctor and his friend met the bard who, in the course of conversation stated that there was to be a meeting of the Lodge that evening, and that he would be there. Mackenzie and his friend resolved to be

present also, but they did not arrive until after the Lodge had been opened. When they had sat for some time, the stranger turned to the doctor, and enquired what had become of Burns.

"Become of him?" repeated Mackenzie; "don't you see him in the chair?"

"No," answered his friend; "that is certainly not the man we saw in the afternoon."

But, adds the anecdotist, it was the Poet nevertheless "under new circumstances."

The year 1786 was a crowded and momentous one in the life of Robert Burns. His growing fame as a poet tempted him to volume publication, and he sent his verses to the press of Bro. John Wilson of Kilmarnock, whence they issued in a slim octavo that is now worth considerably more than its weight in gold. About the same time he got into trouble with Jean Armour, and, irritated more perhaps by the attitude of her father than by the conduct of the girl herself, he, according to one school of Burnsites, transferred his fickle affections to Highland

Mary, the maid-servant of his Masonic friend and brother, Gavin Hamilton. The stilted, if popular, lines "To Mary in Heaven," and the fertile imaginings of the Mariolaters tell us that they lived their day of parting love and then separated—Mary to return to her Highland home to prepare for her marriage to the poet, and the poet to go back to his farm and try to forget Jean Armour by running

into all kinds of dissipation and riot,  
mason-meetings, drinking-matches,  
and other mischief.

But thoughts of the girl who was about to become a mother defied all these distractions; even his vows to Mary Campbell, fortified as they were by a gift of a Bible inscribed with his signature and his Mason-mark, were powerless to drive bonnie Jean out of his head; and as a final attempt at a cure he resolved to shake the dust of Scotland from his feet, and become a slave-driver in Jamaica. The instant success that attended the publication of his volume, however, altered all his plans, and he abandoned the West Indies for the Scottish capital.

Robert Chambers, and those like-minded, who believe in fitting everything Burns ever wrote into its proper place, say that it was at this time that he composed his famous "Farewell to the Brethren of St James's Lodge," which is undoubtedly the most felicitous of his Masonic verses. On the 12th of June, 1786, he settled to go to Jamaica, but apparently he was not quite clear on the point as, on the 16th of the same month, he allowed himself to be re-elected Depute-Master of the Lodge. Annotating the "Farewell," Messrs Henley and Henderson say, "the verses, it is supposed, were recited at a meeting of the Lodge held on the 23rd June." If this is correct, the meeting was probably that to which Burns had sent his rhyming invitation to Dr Mackenzie. The "Farewell," which may be sung to the tune, "Good-night, and joy be wi' you a'," is as follows:—

Adieu! a heart-warm fond adieu;  
Dear Brothers of the **Mystic Tie!**  
Ye favour'd, ye enlighten'd few,  
Companions of my social joy!  
Tho' I to foreign lands must hie,  
Pursuing Fortune's slidd'ry ba';

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With melting heart and brimful eye,  
I'll mind you still, tho' far awa.

Oft have I met your social band,  
And spent the cheerful, festive night;  
Oft, honour'd with supreme command,  
Presided o'er the **Sons of Light**;  
And by that **Hieroglyphic** bright,  
Which none but **Craftsmen** ever saw!  
Strong Mem'ry on my heart shall write  
Those happy scenes when far awa.

May Freedom, Harmony, and Love,  
Unite you in the **Grand Design**,  
Beneath th' Omniscient Eye above—  
The glorious **Architect Divine**—  
That you may keep th' **Unerring Line**,  
Still rising by the **Plummet's Law**,  
Till **Order** bright completely shine,  
Shall be my pray'r, when far awa.

And you farewell! whose merits claim  
Justly that **Highest Badge** to wear:  
Heav'n bless your honour'd, noble Name,  
To Masonry and Scotia dear!  
A last request permit me here,  
When yearly ye assemble a',  
One round, I ask it with a tear,  
To him, the Bard that's far awa.

Had Burns's intention to emigrate been fulfilled, it is not unlikely that these verses would have ended his active personal association with Scottish Freemasonry, in which event they could not have failed to be regarded as a fitting and dignified conclusion to an

interesting career. The subject of the compliment in the closing stanza has given rise to some discussion. Undoubtedly the person entitled "the Highest Badge to wear" was the Grand Master of the Lodge, and the Grand Master of St James's at that date was Captain James Montgomerie, a younger brother of Colonel Hugh Montgomerie, afterwards Earl of Eglinton. The Rev. J. C. Higgins of Tarbolton states positively, however, in his "Life of Robert Burns" that the person alluded to was William Wallace, sheriff of Ayrshire, and Grand Master of St David's Lodge, and the view is supported by the fact that the Sheriff bore a name which is "to Scotia dear." Freemasons, however, will always find it difficult to believe that Burns, in taking farewell of the brethren of his own Lodge, would ignore the Grand Master of his own Lodge, and go out of his way to pay a compliment to the Grand Master of a rival Lodge. In the absence of absolute evidence it seems reasonable to assume that Captain Montgomerie is entitled to the honour and his name "to Masonry," if not to Scotia, was prob-

ably as dear as that of Sheriff Wallace. The poet's request to be remembered yearly at the festive board is regularly honoured in St James's.

When Burns was re-elected Depute-Master in 1786, his brother Gilbert went into office as Junior Warden. His epoch-making volume was issued on 31st July, the whole impression of six hundred copies was sold in a few weeks, and Burns found himself with £20 in hand. He determined to sail for Jamaica in August, but something intervened and the date was postponed. Meanwhile friends urged him to go to Edinburgh and follow up his initial success by a second edition. These solicitations weighed with the Poet, who may never have been enamoured of the idea of leaving his native land, and the project was gradually abandoned.

Burns's brethren of the Craft were not slow to recognise his genius. The earliest appreciation came from Lodge St John Kilwinning, Kilmarnock, No. 24 (now No. 22). The bard was present at a meeting held on 26th October, 1786, in the old Commercial Inn, now demolished, in Croft Street, and presid-



ed over by Major William Parker. The Minute records that a local farmer was entered apprentice, and that, at the same time, " Robert Burns, poet from Mauchline, a member of St James's, Tarbolton, was made an honorary member " of the Lodge. In later days his genius was to move various Lodges to appreciation, and in that connection it is interesting to note that this is his first honorary membership, and the first occasion on which he is described as a Poet.

Burns was doubtless well pleased by the honour which was conferred upon him, and he returned the compliment by writing a song in praise of the Lodge and its Grand Master. It was first printed by Allan Cunningham in 1834, and " honest Allan," who had a rare gift of imagination, alleges that it was recited by the Poet at the time when he was admitted to honorary membership. It may be sung to the tune of " Shawn-boy," or " Over the water to Charlie," and is in these terms:—

Ye sons of old Killie, assembled by Willie  
To follow the noble vocation,  
Your thrifty old mother has scarce such an-  
other

K. 128

To sit in that honorèd station!  
 I've little to say, but only to pray  
 (As praying's the *ton* of your fashion).  
 A prayer from the Muse you well may excuse  
 ('Tis seldom her favourite passion):—

Ye Powers who preside o'er the wind and  
 the tide,  
 Who markèd each element's border,  
 Who formèd this frame with beneficent aim,  
 Whose sovereign statute is order,  
 Within this dear mansion may wayward,  
 Contention  
 Or witherèd Envy ne'er enter!  
 May Secrecy round be the mystical bound,  
 And brotherly Love be the centre!

It is generally believed that Burns visited a number of Lodges in the immediate locality. His friend Gavin Hamilton was Master of Loudon Kilwinning, Newmilns, and at a meeting held on 27th March, 1786, Burns was introduced to the brethren and, "much to the satisfaction of the Lodge," was admitted a member, Bro. John Morton, a merchant in Newmilns becoming "answerable for" his "admission money." A writer in the "Burns Chronicle" for 1893 states that the poet was present at a Mason Lodge held at Sorn on 5th October, 1786; and the Rev. Henry Ranken, B.D., minister of Irvine, writing to the same Annual for



The House in which the Bachelors' Club met  
(Back View).



1905, says that Burns "mixed with the brethren of the Craft in St Andrew's Lodge in Irvine," stating that "it is conjectured that it was in that town" that the "stanza added in a Mason Lodge" was tacked on to his halting verses in glorification of a "big-belly'd bottle":—

Then fill up a bumper and make it o'erflow,  
And honours Masonic prepare for to throw:  
May ev'ry true Brother of the Compass and  
Square,

Have a big-belly'd bottle, when harass'd  
with care.

As the days passed the call of Edinburgh became more insistent. Burns presided at a meeting of St James's on 10th November, and there is a tradition that, having abandoned the idea of going to Jamaica, he then bade farewell to the Lodge in anticipation of his journey to the Capital. The parting was of a more than usually hearty character, but the nature of it rests upon the evidence of John Lees, the Tyler, as there is no record of the event in the Minute-Book. Lees was a Tarbolton shoemaker, who claimed that in his young days he assisted Burns in some of his courting expeditions, though,

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truth to tell, judged by their success the poet had little need of help. Dwelling upon his reminiscences of the Bard, he used to recount with regard to this particular parting night, that "Burns came in a pair of buck-skins, out of which he would always pull the other shilling for the other bowl, till it was five in the morning," adding that it was "an awful night **that!**"

Burns reached Edinburgh on the 28th of November, and some of the happiest moments of his crowded hour of glorious life were associated with Freemasonry. Two days after his arrival, the Grand Lodge of Scotland celebrated the Festival of St Andrew. The brethren, assembled in the aisle of St Giles' Cathedral, where they elected their office-bearers, and thereafter walked in procession to St Andrew's Church, where the Rev. James Wright of Maybole, popularly known as "Brotherly Love" conducted a Masonic service. An invitation to join the procession was extended to brethren from the country, and it is just possible that Burns may have trod the streets clothed as a Mason.



A few days later—on the 7th of December—a rather important meeting of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning took place. Burns was present, and among the acquaintances which he formed were those of Lord Glencairn and the Hon. Henry Erskine. The introductions are believed to have been made by Bro. James Dalrymple of Orange-field, near Ayr, who had previously known the poet. Of the kindly interest of these three brethren Burns wrote in terms of highest praise. Addressing his friend, Gavin Hamilton, the same evening he says:—

I am in a fair way to becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan. . . . My Lord Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty, Mr H. Erskine, have taken me under their wing; and by all probability I shall soon be the tenth worthy, and the eighth wise man of the world. . . . I have met in Mr Dalrymple, of Orangefield, what Solomon emphatically calls, “A friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

The Earl of Glencairn never lost interest in Burns. He introduced the

poet to Creech, the publisher, secured the patronage of the Caledonian Hunt, did everything in his power to obtain subscribers among the nobility, and used his influence to get Burns into the Excise. Nor did Burns ever fail to appreciate his worth. Glencairn died some three years later, and the poet, learning of the event, wrote to his Lordship's factor, saying :—

Dare I trouble you to let me know  
privately before the day of interment,  
that I may cross the country, and  
steal among the crowd, to pay a tear  
to the last sight of my ever revered  
benefactor?

He embalmed the memory of a gracious personality, and gave expression to his gratitude in a singularly moving "Lament," which concludes with a stanza that is among the finest things that came from his gifted pen :—

The bridegroom may forget the bride  
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;  
The monarch may forget the crown  
That on his head an hour has been;  
The mother may forget the bairn  
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;  
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,  
And a' that thou hast done for me!



The introduction to Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty was but the beginning of Burns's triumph. With every day his fame grew and interest in his work increased. He visited St Andrew's Lodge on 12th January, 1787, where he became the central figure in an event that must never have faded from his memory. The occasion was the annual visit of Grand Lodge and no pen could describe the scene better than that of Burns himself. Writing the following day to Bro. John Ballantine of Ayr, he said:—

I went to a Mason Lodge yesternight where the Most Worshipful Grand Master Charteris and all the Grand Lodge of Scotland visited. The meeting was most numerous and elegant; all the different Lodges about town were present in all their pomp. The Grand Master who presided with great solemnity, and honour to himself as a Gentleman and Mason, among other general toasts gave "Caledonia and Caledonia's Bard, Brother Burns," which rung through the whole Assembly with multiplied honours and repeated ac-

clamations. As I had no idea such a thing would happen, I was downright thunderstruck, and trembling in every nerve made the best return in my power. Just as I finished, some of the Grand Officers said so loud as I could hear, with a most comforting accent, "Very well indeed," which set me something to rights again.

Other Masonic honours came to the poet. On 1st February he was welcomed into the membership of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning. Alexander Ferguson of Craigdarroch occupied the Chair, and the Minute sets forth that:

The R.W. Master having observed that Brother Burns was at present in the Lodge, who is well known as a great poetic writer, and for a late publication of his works, which have been universally commended, submitted that he should be assumed a member of this Lodge, which was unanimously agreed to, and he was assumed accordingly.

At this point an interesting tradition begins to take shape. After recording Burns's admission as a member the

Minute concludes by saying that:—

Having spent the evening in a very social manner, as the meetings of the Lodge always have been, it was adjourned till next monthly meeting; and the traditionalists maintain that at the next monthly meeting Burns was installed as Poet-Laureate. Dr Charles Rogers in "*The Book of Robert Burns*" says that the installation took place on 25th June when Lord Torphichen was Master, but Rogers—though a Freemason—was ever a careless and inaccurate writer. Almost sixty years afterwards Bro. Stewart Watson, Secretary of the Lodge, and an artist of repute, transferred the incident to canvas under the title of "*The Inauguration of Burns as Poet Laureate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning,*" and through the picture itself, or the numberless copies of its many reproductions, the ceremonial of installation has been made familiar to every Scottish Freemason. Clothed as a brother, and with his right hand on his left breast, Burns is seen in the act of ascending the steps in front of the Master, while the Master stoops to place the laurel wreath upon his brow.

Around the Lodge are grouped some sixty of the illustrious brethren of his time drawn from the lordly, the elite, the joyously witty, and the rampant conviviais, all assembled in the picturesque hall famous for melody and mirth. Bro. Stewart Watson's picture is fortified by a rather curious volume entitled "A Winter with Robert Burns," which was written by Bro. James Marshall, and which furnishes some particulars as to the "Inauguration," and supplies biographical sketches of the various personages who figured in the ceremonial. The Lodge clings fondly to the tradition; but, in spite of the picture and the book, many people maintain that the incident is a fable, and these opposing views have been set forth with considerable warmth.

It is unfortunate that Lodge Canon-gate Kilwinning cannot produce any contemporary record in support of the claim. The Minute of 1st March is silent on the subject which is certainly singular, and not till long afterwards are there any references to the matter. In 1815, the brethren subscribed to the

fund for the erection of the mausoleum of Burns who, they said, "had been Poet Laureate to the Lodge," and twenty years later they elected the Ettrick Shepherd to succeed Burns as poet-laureate. Hogg, in returning thanks for the honour done him, expressly acknowledged the compliment of being called to succeed Burns, and the brethren drank to the memory of the National Bard as "the last Poet Laureate of the Lodge." These deliberate assertions must have been made in the presence of persons who were members of the Lodge in 1787, and who, consequently, may be presumed to have been familiar with the facts. No one appears to have contradicted the statements. In addition there is the testimony of a Brother William Petrie who stated to the artist in 1845 that he had been present at the "Inauguration;" but Petrie does not find a place in Watson's picture and the reference to him in Marshall's book inspires small confidence. Petrie had mentioned to the artist, and the author, that he had discharged the duties of Tyler for more than fifty years whereupon Watson re-



marked that he must remember Robert Burns.

The name operated like electricity, writes Marshall, and, as if a string was touched long unaccustomed to vibration, weakness, dullness, and inarticulation were shaken off like dust in sunshine, and he re-iterated, "Rabbie Burns! Mind Rabbie! I'll no forget him, puir fellow! Eh, but he was the life o' the Lodge!"

Murray Lyon, however, tells us that during Burns's residence in Edinburgh, the Lodge held only three meetings and at one only is Burns recorded as having been present. At that rate he had not much chance for exhibiting vitality, and Petrie's anecdote is suspiciously like a variant of the reminiscence of John Lees of Tarbolton.

The chief grounds on which the tradition is assailed are the absence of any mention of the incident in the records of the Lodge, the absolute and unimaginable silence of Burns on a matter that could not have failed to give him very great satisfaction, and the fact that Watson's picture is unhistoric in so far as it introduces

portraits of men who were not Freemasons, one of whom did not know Burns until two years

later. The point will never be lifted out of the region of dispute. Even so keen a student of Masonic history as the late Grand Secretary, Bro. David Murray Lyon, spoke with two voices on the subject, each of them, apparently, the voice of conviction. Writing to the Lodge—and the Lodge showed its appreciation by engrossing the letter in its Minute Book—he said :—

The Poet Burns was a member, and was elected Poet Laureate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning, to which many of his friends belonged. He was not installed as represented by Bro. Stewart Watson's picture, but there may have been some ceremony on the occasion. Probably there was. There is evidence for it.

Examining the subject in his "History of the Lodge of Edinburgh," he says :—

There can be no doubt that Burns was never elected to, and never held the office of Poet-Laureate of the Lodge, and that the alleged ceremony



of his installation into that office never took place. . . . The Poet's election and inauguration is a myth!

And with these conflicting opinions the matter may be left as a nut for literary and Masonic antiquaries to crack.

Meanwhile, Burns was surely winning his way to the position of Poet-Laureate of the Scottish people. Dugald Stewart says,

The attentions he received during his stay in town from all ranks and descriptions of persons, were such as would have turned any head but his own.

Alison Cockburn, the author of "The Flowers of the Forest," writes,

The town is . . . agog with the ploughman poet . . . The man will be spoiled, if he can spoil; but he keeps his simple manners and is quite sober.

Dalzel, professor of Greek in Edinburgh University, states that,

We have got a poet in town just now, whom everybody is taking notice of—a ploughman from Ayrshire—a man of unquestionable genius. . . . He runs the risk of being spoiled by

the excessive attention paid him just now by persons of all ranks. Those who know him best, say he has too much good sense to allow himself to be spoiled.

From Edinburgh the circle of his fame widened. Early in May, he left the city for a tour in the Borders, accompanied by Bro. Robert Ainslie, a light-hearted lawyer's apprentice, and when he reached Eyemouth, he found his brethren ready to exalt him to the degree of the Royal Arch. The ceremony took place in St Abb's Lodge, and is recorded in the Minute Book as follows:—

Eyemouth, 19th May, 1787.

At a general encampment held this day, the following brethren were made Royal Arch Masons—namely, Robert Burns, from the Lodge of St James's, Tarbolton, Ayrshire, and Robert Ainslie, from the Lodge of St Luke's, Edinburgh, by James Carmichael, Wm. Grieve, Daniel Dow, John Clay, Robert Grieve, &c., &c. Robert Ainslie paid one guinea admission dues; but on account of R. Burns's remarkable poetical genius,

the encampment unanimously agreed to admit him gratis, and considered themselves honoured by having a man of such shining abilities for one of their companions.

Burns spent the day with one of the Companions whom he describes as "a joyous warm-hearted, jolly, clever fellow," who took a hearty glass and sang a good song. Evidently the ceremony of exaltation had been carried through in the Lodge, and, as an interesting point in Masonic history, it may be mentioned that, three months later, the brethren who had constituted the Encampment received a Charter from England authorising them to be erected into a Chapter, under the name of "Land of Cakes," and numbered 52 on the English roll. The Companions chose as their Principals three of the men who had exalted Burns—William Grieve, Z.; Robert Grieve, H.; and James Carmichael, J. To-day the Chapter is under the Scottish Constitution; its number is 15.

Crossing the country to Dumfries, where he received the freedom of the burgh, Burns turned northwards to-

wards Ayr and reached his farm at Mossgiel on the 9th of June. He was re-elected Depute Master ten days later, but there is no record of his being present at the meeting, and the Minute is unsigned. Bro. William Hunter, R.W.M. of Lodge Journeyman Masons, Edinburgh, who, in 1858, published a pamphlet dealing with the subject repeats a statement made by the author of "A Winter with Robert Burns" to the effect that the poet was present at the annual election of office-bearers of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning on 25th June—Hunter gives the date as 26th—but this is manifestly a mistake as the poet was in the West Highlands at the time, and on 25th June wrote from Arrochar to his friend and companion of his Border Tour, Robert Ainslie, whom he describes as "My Dear Friend and Brother Arch" with which reference, it may be added, Burns's career as a Royal Arch Companion ends, so far, at least, as record goes. The only later allusion is a simile in a letter written, in 1793, to Graham of Fintry, in which, defending himself from the charge of disloyalty, he says he

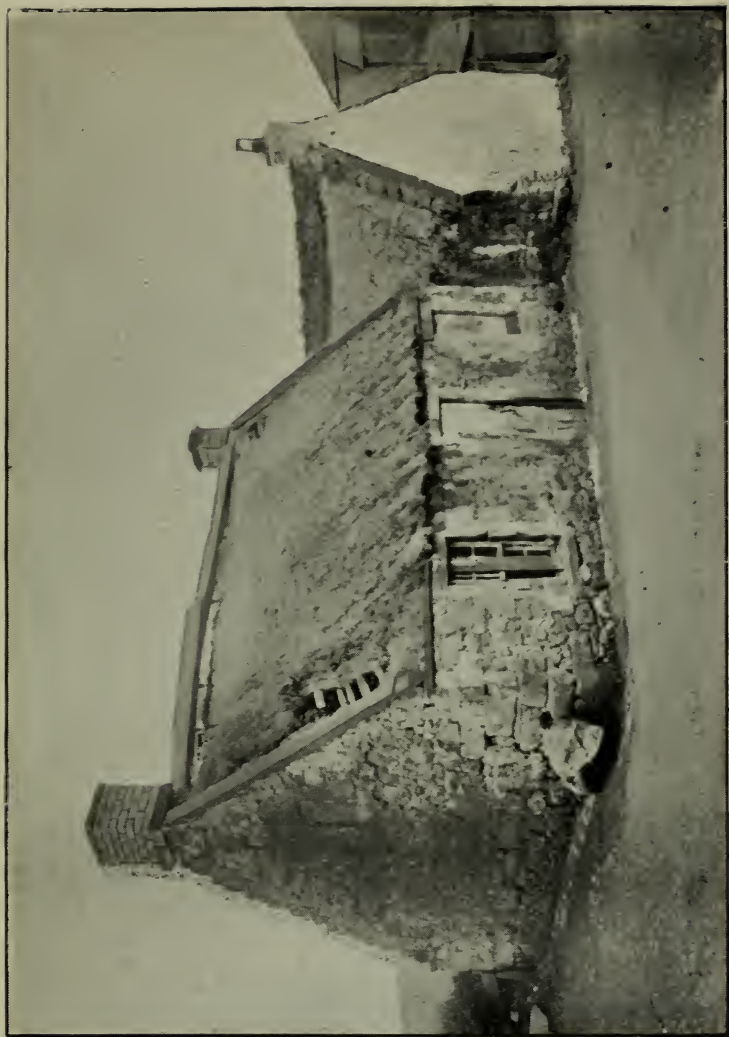
always will revere the Monarch of Great Britain as, to speak in Masonic, the sacred keystone of our Royal Arch constitution.

Reference has already been made to the fact that St James's Lodge, located at Tarbolton, sometimes met by deputation at Mauchline. One notable gathering, under the presidency of Burns, was held there on 25th July, under which date the following record is found in the Minute Book :—

This night the Deputation of the Lodge met at Mauchline, and entered Brother Alexander Allison of Barnmuir an apprentice. Likewise admitted Bro. Professor Stuart of Cathrine, and Claude Alexander, Esq., of Ballochmyle; Claude Neilson, Esq., Paisley; John Farquhar Gray, Esq., of Gilmiscroft; and Dr George Grierson, Glasgow, Honorary members of the Lodge.

Of this group of worthies three at least had associations other than Masonic with the poet; Stewart was one of those who welcomed him to Edinburgh; Alexander was a relative of the bonnie lass of Ballochmyle, and Gray





**Manson's Inn in 1906—The building in which Lodge St. James held its Meetings while Burns was Depute Master.**





was the Justice of the Peace who, according to tradition, finally married Burns and Jean in a Mauchline ale-house.

The poet returned to Edinburgh in the early days of August to settle with Creech, his publisher, to make some sort of arrangement with a servant-girl who was "under a cloud" on his account, and to prepare for a tour through what he regarded as "the classic scenes of his native country." Meanwhile the quarterly meeting of his Tarbolton Lodge was approaching and, as important business was to be discussed he was moved to send an apology for absence. What the exact nature of the business was does not appear, but evidently the brethren had found it necessary to take action for the recovery of certain debts, and were now to decide on further procedure. Burns was all for leniency. The letter, which is addressed to "Men and Brethren" and is dated, "Edinburgh, 23rd August," is as follows:—

I am truly sorry it is not in my power to be at your quarterly meeting. If I must be absent in body,

believe me I shall be present in spirit. I suppose those who owe us monies, by bill or otherwise, will appear—I mean those we summoned. If you please, I wish you would delay prosecuting defaulters till I come home. The court is up, and I will be home before it sits down. In the meantime to take a note of who appear and who do not, of our faulty debtors, will be right in my humble opinion; and those who confess debt and crave days, I think we should spare them. Farewell!

Accompanied by Willie who brewed the immortal peck o' maut, Burns set out for the north two days later. The furthest point he reached was about ten miles beyond Inverness; he travelled, in all, nearly 600 miles, the tour extended over twenty-two days, and he reached Edinburgh on the return journey on 16th September. Burns for-gathered with many brother-masons on the way, but so far as existing record goes he did not enjoy the hospitality of any Lodge. Stirling Ancient 30, however, cherishes the belief that he attended one of its meetings during his

brief stay in the City of the Rock, and, according to custom, inscribed his name in the Attendance Register. The fact was well-known to brethren who, in bygone days, were wont to produce the Register for the examination of any distinguished visitor. On one occasion, when it was so requisitioned, the brethren discovered that the page containing the poet's signature had been abstracted. At a later period the Register itself disappeared. Thus, like Canongate Kilwinning with its Poet Laureateship, Stirling Ancient cannot produce any documentary proof of the poet's visit, but at this date (1921) there are still brethren alive who testify that they have seen the signature.

Burns spent the winter in Edinburgh philandering with Clarinda, trying to get a settlement with Creech, and negotiating with Bro. Patrick Millar for a lease of Ellisland, and, through "Lang Sandy Wood," for an appointment in the Excise. Both of these interested friends were members of Canongate Kilwinning; it is said that "he was present at many meetings of the Masonic Craft during the winter," and that

when he attended Canongate Kilwinning he "usually sat near the wall between the dais and the organ recess." The poet's active association with Freemasonry, and frequent attendance at lodges which is here implied, do not rest on much documentary evidence. Beyond the solitary record in the Minute Book of Canongate Kilwinning, and his allusion in his correspondence to what transpired at the historic meeting of St Andrew's Lodge, the only reference occurs in an undated letter to Mr Archibald Lawrie, son of an Ayrshire manse, then a student in Edinburgh. Writing from the Lawnmarket he says:—

To-night the Grand Master and Lodge of Masons appear at the Theatre in form. I am determined to go to the play. . . . I will call on you a few minutes before the Theatre opens.

The Craft frequently patronised the drama by attending some favoured Theatre in full Masonic costume, and it is to such an occasion that the poet alludes.

Burns returned to Ayrshire in March

to be instructed in the duties of a gauger at the hands of Bro. James Findlay, officer of excise at Tarbolton. He presided at a meeting of St James's held on 23rd May, but in view of his impending removal to Dumfries-shire, it was necessary that the Lodge should secure another Depute Master, and this they found in Burns's instructor in the duties of the excise, for they appointed Bro. Findlay to the position on the 24th of June, by which date Burns had entered upon his farm at Ellisland.

The poet had the experience of most people in leaving the old home. Addressing his friend and brother, Hugh Parker, he tells him that he finds Dumfries "a strange land" and an "uncouth clime," "wi' nae kind face but Jenny Geddes," his favourite mare, and having the jovial hours of the approaching annual midsummer Masonic procession in his mind he says:—

Wi' a' this care and a' this grief,  
And sma' sma' prospect of relief,  
And nought but peat reek i' my head,  
How can I write what ye can read?  
Tarbolton, twenty-fourth o' June,  
Ye'll find me in a better tune.

He was in Mauchline on the 23rd, so



that it is not unlikely that he forgathered with Parker and other kindred spirits at the annual meeting of the Lodge, on the anniversary of St John the Baptist. Not till the following December was the farmhouse of Ellisland in a condition to receive the poet's wife and family, and during the intervening months he was frequently back in Ayrshire. His interest in the affairs of St James's was still lively, and the Minute Book records two meetings held at Mauchline at both of which he presided, the one on 21st October, and the other on the 11th of November.

The meeting on that Martinmas night concludes Burns's connection with St James's Lodge. It is not too much to say that during the four years he discharged the duties of Deputemaster he was the life and soul of the Lodge, and he left it an immortal memory. The Minute-Book which contains the record of his activities remains a sacred possession of the brethren who have withstood every temptation to sell. Three of the minutes are written in full by the poet, one of which bears marks of literary conceit, the antithesis

at anyrate being worthy of note. Writing under date 1st September, 1784, he records:—

This night the Lodge met and ordered four pounds of candles and one quire of eightpence paper for the use of the Lodge, which money was laid out by the Treasurer, and the candles and paper laid in accordingly.

Between the first and last signature Burns signed in all twenty-nine times—twenty-five of these as Depute Master, certifying the accuracy of the proceedings. There is considerable diversity in the signatures. At first it is "Burness" changing later to "Burns." The initial varies from the initial "R" to the full "Robert," but is most frequently the familiar contraction "Robt." Mr Peter Watson, Tarbolton, who made an exhaustive examination of the book in preparation for a series of articles published in 1890 says:—

Amongst a long list of signatures of members, many of them having their Mason's marks attached, we find Burns signing himself in full "Robert Burns," and adding his



Masonic mark of nine points in the same line. This signature has less resemblance to the familiar and undoubtedly genuine form than any of the others, but there is no date to it, and it is just possible that the conditions under which he signed were what the lodge might term "unfortunate;"

by which, one presumes, that Mr Watson means that Burns had been "a merry Mason."

In addition to the Minute Book the Lodge preserves a number of relics associated with the poet: the Chair, footstool, and mallet used by him as Depute Master; the silver badge to which he alludes in his "Farewell;" a Bible and an ink bottle which are minuted as having been purchased while Burns was in office; a square and compasses which are believed to be those referred to in a minute, dated 15th September, 1785; the Letter which Burns wrote from Edinburgh counselling the brethren to be lenient with, if not to forgive, their debtors; and a section of a hawthorn tree which grew on the banks of the Fail, at the spot

where the romantic parting of Burns and Highland Mary is alleged to have taken place.

In his new home at Ellisland Burns heard the call of the Craft. It is possible that he was present at meetings of lodges in Dumfries during the early days of his residence, but his formal connection with Freemasonry in the Queen of the South began on 27th December, 1788, when he was admitted to membership in Dumfries St Andrew No. 179. The minute may have been written under circumstances which men of the mind of Mr Peter Watson would call "unfortunate:" at all events it is a rather singular collection of inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation, and matters of fact. The quaint record tells us that:—

The Brethren having Selebrated the Anniversary of St John in the usual manner and Brother Burns in Aelliesland of St Davids Strabolton Lodge No 178 being present The Lodge unanimously assumed him a member of the Lodge being a Master Masson he subscribed the regulations as a member

It is hardly necessary to dwell upon the inaccuracies—the Secretary's head may not have been too clear after the St John's Festival. Burns may have claimed a connection with both of the Tarbolton lodges, and the Secretary may have thought to do justice to all concerned by linking the name of the one with the number of the other.

The Master of St Andrew at that date was John Aiken, but he was absent from this meeting, and Burns was received as an affiliate by Bro. Burgess, his Depute. The poet continued in more or less active membership with this Dumfries Lodge during the remaining years of his life. He was one of five brethren who constituted a meeting in the Globe Tavern in April, 1790, and as had been the case at Tarbolton, Mauchline, and Edinburgh, he made many warm Masonic friends. A testimonial of one of these is extant in the shape of an apron described as of chamois leather, very fine, with figures of gold, some of them relieved with green, others with a dark-red colour [while] on the under side of the semi-circular part which is turn-

ed down at the top is written in a bold, fair hand: " Charles Sharpe, of Hotham, to Rabbie Burns. Dumfries, Dec. 12, 1791."

Sharpe, who was an excellent violinist, and a composer of both music and verse, would find Burns a kindred spirit in Masonry and in song.

A few days before he received the gift of the Masonic apron from the Laird of Hoddam, the poet, having been bested in the fight with poverty—which he calls the " half-sister of death " and " cousin-german of hell "—had renounced his lease of Ellisland, and moved his family and furniture to a small house in Dumfries, to pursue his calling as a gauger, and enjoy such comforts as could be obtained out of a salary of £70 a year. From the date when he arrived in the town until his death in 1796, the Lodge of St Andrew met on sixteen occasions, and on eleven of these Burns was in attendance. At the meeting in December, 1791, he was present with his fellow-gauger Alexander Findlater who, when the bitter controversy over Burns's alleged drunkenness was raging, defended the poet

from the charge that he was a soaker. He was also at the meeting on 5th June, 1792, when John Syme was admitted, the same Syme who, it is alleged, declared that the bard was burnt to a cinder through over-indulgence in drink. At a meeting in February, 1792, the poet had acted as a steward, and his interest in the affairs of the lodge so influenced the brethren that they elected him Senior Warden. His duties in that office, however, were light as the Lodge did not meet till the next anniversary, when Burns, who was ill, was absent. He went out of office on that date, and his friend Findlater was elected Junior Warden. He was present at the next anniversary gathering—29th November, 1794—when Findlater was promoted Senior Warden. He was at neither of the meetings held in 1795, but he was present at one on the 28th of January, 1796, when, on his recommendation James Georgeson, a Liverpool merchant, was entered an apprentice, and when, true to their tradition as merry Masons, the brethren decided to apply Bro. Georgeson's fees towards defray-



ing the expenses of the night. The next meeting of the Lodge was held in the Coffee House on 14th April. Burns was among those who assembled, but he was far gone in his last illness, and it has been suggested that his attendance was prompted by the fact that Captain Adam Gordon, brother of his friend Gordon of Kenmure presented himself for initiation. And that, so far as appears, was Burns's last active connection with Freemasonry. He died on 21st July. His association with Dumfries St Andrew invested the furnishings of the Lodge with special interest. Certain relics of his time came into the market in 1879, and through the generosity of the Grand Master of that day, Sir Michael Shaw Stewart, the Grand Lodge of Scotland counts among her treasures, the Minute Book of the Lodge containing the poet's signature to the Regulations, and the record of his admission; the Mallet wielded by the Master, and an apron used in the Lodge in Burns's day.

St James's Lodge, Tarbolton, of which he was Depute Master, and St Andrew's Lodge, Dumfries, of which



he was Senior Warden, treasure relics of the poet. His mother lodge, St David, Tarbolton, is not in the same happy position. That Lodge fell upon evil days, its possessions were scattered and it was at length struck off the roll of Grand Lodge. This took place in 1843, and for the next thirty-four years it was wholly out of existence. Some enthusiasts, however, determined to re-establish Burns's Mother Lodge, and in 1877 it began work at Mauchline under its original Charter, with the designation of St David, "Tarbolton," Mauchline, No. 133, the brethren selecting as their first Right Worshipful Master, Major James Wallace Dunlop Adair, grandson of the Dr Adair who accompanied Burns on one of his Scottish tours, and of Charlotte Hamilton, the heroine of one of his songs, and probably also the subject of his amatory verses "Fairest Maid on Devon Banks." The Minute Book of St David's Lodge which contains the record of his being entered Apprentice, passed Fellowcraft, and raised Master Mason, is not, unfortunately, in the possession of the Lodge. It is one of

the attractions of the Burns Tavern at the Cross, Tarbolton!

Burns was an enthusiastic Freemason, and more enthusiastic, if less eminent, brethren have not hesitated to assert that he owed all his advancement to the fact that he was a member of "the mystic tie," but these brethren allow their zeal for the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity to outrun their judgment. Cheap brands of whisky may be popularised by labelling them with the Square and Compasses, and pinch-beck jewellery may be pushed by the same impudent and unworthy means, but literary genius is in a different case, and men achieve immortality on their merits, and independent of every sort of adventitious aid. Burns had come into his own before the influential Freemasons of the Scottish capital interested themselves in the wonderful "ploughman" who appealed to them as a kind of curiosity; and, for the honour of the Craft, one would not like to think that the Grand Lodge Officers who feasted him for an hour—if they feasted him as a Freemason—then allowed him—as a Freemason—to sink

into poverty and distress in old Dumfries.

While it is true that Burns does not owe any of his literary greatness to the fact that he was a Mason, it is, at the same time, noteworthy that almost all his friends in Ayrshire and in Edinburgh were members of the Craft. It is easy to trace a long line of acquaintances, through all the social grades, beginning with Lord Elcho, the Grand Master Mason of Scotland, and finishing with daidlin', drunken Jamie Humphry, the bletherin' bitch of the Tarbolton Lodge. Reference has already been made in these pages to many brethren whose names are linked with that of Burns in a Masonic connection, and if one were to enumerate all who are thus associated with him a very lengthy catalogue of names would result. Brief reference may be made to a few of those who live in the shadow of his fame. Earliest among these were John Richmond who shared his humble lodging with Burns when the poet arrived in Edinburgh; Robert Aiken, his "loved, his honoured, much-respected friend," who figures as "orator Bob" in "The

And ye shall not wear  
by My Name falsely—  
I am the Lord.

Levit. 19 Chap: 12<sup>th</sup> Verse



Inscription on Vol. I. of Highland Mary's Bible.  
Mason's Mark of the Poet.

The Autograph and



Kirk's Alarm," who "read Burns into fame," who secured no fewer than 145 subscribers for the *Kilmarnock* volume, to whom Burns inscribed "The Cottar's Saturday Night," and to whom also, when the grim Tyler of Eternity ushered him within the Veil, the poet paid the fine tribute of saying "a warmer heart death ne'er made cold;"  
Gavin Hamilton,

the poor man's friend in need,  
The Gentleman in word and deed;

Provost Ballantine of Ayr, the "ever honoured patron," to whom he dedicated "The Twa Brigs;" and "the King of a' the core," Tam Samson of the famous "Elegy," once one of the best known of Burns's poems. Others who belonged to the same locality were Sir John Whitefoord, the Grand Master to whom the members of St James's appealed when the Lodge was in distress, and whose misfortune, when the failure of the Ayr Bank caused him to sell his ancestral acres, inspired Burns to compose his pathetic lament, "Farewell, farewell sweet Ballochmyle!"; James Tennant of Glenconner, the poet's "auld comrade dear and brither sin-



ner," the waggish farmer who enjoyed a joke and a gill—

rough, rude, ready-witted Rankine,  
'The wale o' cocks for fun and drinkin';

John Dove, the Mauchline innkeeper, to whom he playfully refers as "Johnie Pigeon;" and James Smith,

the slee'st pawkie thief,  
That e'er attempted stealth or rief;

and John M'Math, the minister of Tarbolton, who figures in "The Twa Herds," and whose convivial habits, on Masonic and other occasions, ultimately led to his resignation of his sacred office.

John Wilson, who printed the *Kilmarnock* volume, was a Freemason, and when Burns went to Edinburgh he found another Freemason in the person of William Creech—"Oh, Willie was a witty wight!"—willing to undertake publication of the second edition. Alexander Naysmyth who painted, and John Beugo who engraved, the famous portrait of the poet were members of Canongate Kilwinning; and the author of "A Winter with Robert Burns," says that Beugo

was an active member of the Lodge

and took sketches of Burns for improving the likeness and expression.

Other Edinburgh associates were Robert Ainslie, who accompanied him on his Border tour, and of whom he says,

I have set you down as the staff of my old age, when the whole list of my friends will, after a decent share of pity have forgotten me ;

Dr Gregory of "worthy Latin face," and immortal mixture memory ; Lord Monboddo, who stoutly maintained that men were originally born with tails ; William Smellie, whose "caustic wit was biting rude," but whose heart " was warm, benevolent, and good ;" Henry Mackenzie, " The Man of Feeling," who did much to focus the attention of the reading public upon Burns's maiden volume ; " Lang Sandy Wood," the Edinburgh surgeon who attended Burns in his illness, and helped him to a position in the Excise, and to whom the poet refers as "that best of men ;" and Alexander Campbell to whom he refers in his rhyming note to James Tennant, praying that the Lord may

remember singing Sannock  
Wi' hale breeks, saxpence, an' a bannock.

Freemasons who like to believe that the rites and ceremonies of the fraternity appealed to the poet and had a share in moulding his mind affirm that in his

best and most serious writings, in the highest flights of his genius, the spirit of Masonry is ever present, leading, directing, dictating, inspiring;

and in proof of their statement they cite the "Address to the Deil," "Man was made to mourn," and "A man's a man for a' that." It were idle to deny that the beautiful sentiments of the Order had an influence upon the bard, but at the same time there is a strong presumption that Burns was attracted to Freemasonry rather because it was a centre of good-fellowship and social feeling than because it was a system of morality. From his early days festive companionship had appealed to him. With a characteristic flourish of his pen, he tells that, before he was eighteen, he had learned

to look unconcernedly on a large

tavern bill, and mix without fear in  
a drunken squabble ;  
but his brother Gilbert maintains that  
the poet's admission to the Craft  
was his first introduction to the life  
of a boon companion,  
though he adds, with due fraternal soli-  
citude for Burns's good name, that he  
never saw the bard intoxicated, and  
that he was not at all given to liquor.  
In the days of Burns—as in times near-  
er our own—the pint-stoup and the  
toddy-ladle were the working-tools of  
all the Degrees, and as Grand Lodge  
had not yet ruled that fourteen clear  
days must elapse before an entered Ap-  
prentice may be passed Fellowcraft,  
or a Fellowcraft raised to be Master  
Mason, the brethren met as and when  
they felt inclined. Every meeting of  
the Lodge was an opportunity of in-  
dulging the flowing bowl—we have  
seen that the fees for the admission of  
the poet's protege, Bro. Georgeson, at  
Dunfries, were “ applied towards de-  
fraying the expenses of the night ”—  
and the “ big-belly'd bottle ” was the  
point within the circle to which all eyes  
turned with eager interest, Nor was

the circle always purely Masonic. The age was one of hard-drinking generally. Judges and lawyers, doctors and ministers, dukes and earls were carried drunk to bed, and the reputations of men were measured by the punch-bowl and the tappit-hen. An amusing side-light on the drinking proclivities of the county gentry of the poet's time is supplied in Burns's ballad of "The Whistle," that bacchanalian relic of the drunken courtier of Anne of Denmark. The trophy had been won from the Dane by Sir Robert Lowrie of Maxwellton, who later had lost it to Walter Riddell of Glenriddell in whose family it remained until 16th October, 1789, when three boon companions—a later Lowrie, a later Riddell, and Alexander Ferguson of Craigdarroch—met at Friars-Carse for the sole and deliberate purpose of proving their mettle as hard drinkers. Burns tells us they were:—

Three joyous good fellows, with heart clear  
of flaw;  
Craigdarroch, so famous for wit, worth, and  
law;  
And trusty Glenriddell, so skilled in old  
coins;  
And gallant Sir Robert deep-red in old  
wines,



The last beside his chair to fa' was Ferguson who drank upwards of five bottles of claret—and won the Whistle. That the result was in keeping with the festive traditions of the Craft will be conceded when it is remembered that the victorious toper was Right Worshipful Master of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning. As became the Laureate of the Lodge—inaugurated or not!—Burns sang the praises of the winner in his well-known poem, and there is a bogus relic in existence to indicate that some later Burnsite had thought the Laureate's poem deserved some recognition at the hands of the Right Worshipful Master. Under title, "A Relic of Burns," a paragraph from the "Aberdeen Journal" of 9th October, 1872, appears in the "Burns Chronicle" for 1910. The paragraph sets forth that at a sale of the effects of the late Mr Fiske Harrison of Copford Hall, near Colchester, on 30th September, an interesting relic of Burns was sold. It was the Scotch mull, or snuffbox, presented to Burns for having composed his poem on "The Whistle" by one of the competitors for that



convivial trophy. The mull is a beautifully twisted and polished horn, with silver lid inlaid with a pebble, together with its appendages—a long-handled silver spoon and a little hammer, both of silver, suspended by silver chains, also a hare's foot, suspended in the same manner. The inscription round the rim is "Craigdarroch to Robert Burns, the Bard of 'The Whistle,' October 16, 1790. How this Scotch mull came in the possession of the eccentric owner of Copford Hall does not appear.

Probably he got it specially made for himself! Forgers frequently leave some clue to their misdeeds, and here we have it in the date inscribed upon the mull. Burns misdated the contest by a year, and consequently misled many people, including the faker. Documents prove that the event took place on 16th October, 1789. And thus, as a Burns "relic," the mull is not less mythical than the "inauguration" of the poet as laureate of the Lodge at the hands of the winner of the Whistle!

Burns tells us that when he was in trouble with Jean Armour he ran into

all kinds of dissipation and riot, including mason-meetings, and drinking-matches; in his "Epistle to Davie" he says that he was

Whyles daez't wi' love, whyles daez't wi' drink,

Wi' jads or Masons;

and he invited Dr Mackenzie to the festival of Midsummer St John's, to "taste a swatch o' Manson's barrels," adding that he "would be mair than proud to share the mercies" with him. These not infelicitous references to "guid Scots' drink," and some of the friendships which he formed, afford ample indication that he spent many a "cheerful festive night" in Tarbolton and Mauchline, Edinburgh, and Dumfries under the auspices of the Compasses and Square.

Among the jovial friends of his Edinburgh period were a trio of Willies—Dunbar, Nicol, and Cruickshank. Dunbar, who was a writer to the Signet, was Senior Warden of Canongate Kilwinning at the time when Burns was admitted to the Lodge, is described by the poet as "one of the worthiest fellows in the world" and is often alluded to or addressed in terms of warm

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regard. He is the "rattlin', roarin', Willie" of the stanza which Burns added to an old song out of compliment to him as Colonel of the Crochallan Corps, a club of wits of whom the poet was the most famous. Nicol, "Kind honest-hearted Willie," according to Burns, and "a ruffian and detestable fellow," according to certain Burnsites, was one of the Latin masters in Edinburgh High School, where he had as colleague the third of the trio.

"Cruickshank," wrote Burns, "is a glorious production of the Author of Man, dear to me as the ruddy drops that warm my heart;"

writing to the author of "Tullochgorum," he remarked that "Cruickshank was said to be one of the best Latinists of his age," and both the amiability and scholarship of the man were present to the mind of the poet when he penned his epitaph:

Honest Will to Heaven is gane  
And monie shall lament him,  
The fauts he had in Latin lay,  
In English nane e'er kent them.

These three, along with Burns, Jo. Millar, the Junior Warden of Canon-gate Kilwinning, and John Gray, City

Clerk of Edinburgh, who was initiated on the night of the alleged inauguration of the Laureate, are brought together in a symposium of fun, Freemasonry, and whisky which is hit off in the following lines:—

Frae wast to south, tell ilka callan'  
The **corps** maun anchor at Chro callan.  
“And wha gaes there ” thrice Millar grun-  
tit;

“I,” rattlin’ Willie roared and duntit.  
As twal is Tron’d we a’ link out;  
The moon—a ragged washin’ clout—  
Glints shame-fac’d to ae waukriff starrie;  
The nicht’s been wat—the caus’y’s glaurie.

In Davie’s straucht, and numbering  
aicht,

A bowl’s filled to the rarest  
For sang or story;—or wha glory  
In drinkin’ to the fairest.

Soon cheeks and e’en begin to glisten—  
Glibgabbet a’, and nane to listen.

Now tales o’ Tyre, for buikless billies,  
Are tauld by rival pedant Willies;  
How Thebes’ King, when tir’d o’ Sidon,  
Erected Tyre—folk to reside in;  
**Nic Willie** wond’rin’ wha could hire him,  
If’t hadna been the first King Hiram.

“O ye donneril!” cried the Coronel,  
’Twas the hindmost King o’ Tyre.

’Twas nae Hiram, but King Iram,  
For he **finished** it—wi’ fire.”

By this time Burgh Jock’s a-storm  
For Rab had rais’d Jock’s fiend, **Reform**;

“What wad ye hae, ye hell-cat heathens?”  
**Will** answered **Jock**—“The Sett of Athens,  
 Whare yearly Archons were elecit,  
 And people’s richts were mair respect,  
 They managed town affairs fu’ gaylie,  
 Wi’ ne’er a King, or lord, or bailie.  
 Now, by your schule, misshankit fule,  
 What has your scheme to crack o’?  
 Your best tap-sawyer was a lawyer,  
 The bluidy Archon Draco.”

But Latin **Willie**’s reek noo raise,  
 He’d seen that nicht **Rab** crown’d wi’ bays,  
 And heard, the **corps**, wi’ ready roar,  
 Be-knappin’ a’ his classic lore.  
 Still **Cruikie** offers **Nic** a wage,  
 Which best could tell the very age  
 When Draco and when Iram flourished,  
 And if they baith freemasons nourished?  
**Nic**, no that lame, cries—“Wha’s for  
 hame?”  
 “I go,” says ane, “and a’ go;”  
 “If ye wad tell, **Cruik**, speer at hell  
**Pro** Iram **coram** Draco.”

The meeting referred to in these occasionally cryptic verses is probably as mythical as the “inauguration”—on the night of which it is supposed to have taken place—but the stanzas could, with slight modifications, apply to many little social gatherings that were held after the Three Great Lights had been safely stowed away, and the secrets of Freemasonry had been lock-



ed up in the sacred depository with fidelity, fidelity, fidelity.

There is general agreement that the bard was the life and soul of every social gathering. The author of "A Winter with Robert Burns," says that some of those who entered Canongate Kilwinning "became masons in order to meet" him, and James Gray maintains that the poet frequented

convivial parties from the same feelings with which he wrote poetry, because nature had eminently qualified him to shine there.

But all these festive gatherings ate up what he himself calls "slices of his constitution," and thus, unfortunately for himself, he was not a "merry" Mason for nothing. It is probably just a little less than an exaggeration to say that the bard and some of the brothers of the mystic tie had been, like the immortal Tam and the not-less-immortal Souter, fou for weeks thegither. At least tradition alleges that on one occasion Burns and two of his Edinburgh cronies spent a week in Dumfries which was "one unbroken round of merry-making." The trio were the



three merry boys who will live for all time in that little masterpiece of drunken fancy, "Willie brewed a peck o' maut." Nicol had become in Burns's sarcastic phrase "the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills," and, being at Moffat during the autumn vacation of 1789, he was visited by the poet and by their mutual friend Allan Masterton, an Edinburgh writing-master, whom the bard eulogises as one of the worthiest and best hearted of men. The meeting of these Masons was so merry that Masterton and Burns agreed each in his own way to celebrate the business. The poet wrote the words, Masterton composed the air: the result may well stand as the lyrical expression of the festive aspect of what Burns called "the Masonic idea." And the son of Hiram who has a kindly thought for the jovial side of the Craft, and who likes to recall that the three immortal toppers who are enshrined in lyric melody as the blithest lads in Christendie, were Masons, may also like to remember that the Masons' meeting which led to the composition of "Death and Dr. Hornbrook" gave us

the phrase, "the wee short hour ayont the twal," which is now part and parcel of the proverbial philosophy of our social life.

Another Masonic friend with whom Burns sat late was John Syme, who was given to hospitality, and at whose house the poet was a frequent visitor. If it be true that, as already mentioned, Syme stated that Burns was burnt to a cinder, some of the burning had been done at his table.

His jovial parties at Ryedale on the Maxwelltown side of the river, writes Mr Charles S. Dougall in his volume on "The Burns Country," were often carried on well into the morning; and although Burns sometimes did protest that he had still to cross Devorgilla's bridge, it was easy to overrule scruples expressed in such words as he scribbled on a tumbler at Ryedale:

There's Death in the cup, sae beware!

Nay, mair, there is danger in touching!

But wha can avoid the fell snare?

The man and his wine's sae bewitching!

In addition to his songs and the memory of happy days which lived

with those who had joined him at the festive board, Burns left at least two memorials of Masonic conviviality. These were: a punchbowl of Inverary marble which his brother Gilbert presented to Alexander Cunningham, a member of St Luke's Lodge, Edinburgh, and one of the Crochallan Fencibles; and a curious old-fashioned black bottle which held a little less than two imperial gills, which resembled a Mason's mallet, and which now finds an inglorious if fitting resting-place among the relics of a public-house in Dumfries.



Seal of Burns's Mother Lodge.

The Charter for the erection of the Lodge was granted by the Grand Lodge of Scotland on 26th February, 1773. Its original number on the roll was 174. The present number is 133. Colour of clothing—red.



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